

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1-13. (Cancelled)

14. (Original) A method of making a smectite clay slurry, comprising:

(a) treating a mixture of one or more smectite clays and water with one or more phosphonate additives to form a clay slurry; and

(b) shearing the clay slurry.

15. (Original) A method according to Claim 14, wherein the smectite clay is hectorite.

16. (Original) A method according to Claim 14, wherein the phosphonate additive is 1-hydroxyethylene-1,1-diphosphonic acid tetra sodium salt.

17. (Original) A method of making a smectite clay slurry according to Claim 14, wherein the shearing is performed by a Gaulin homogenizer.

18.-22. (Cancelled)